

General

Drawer +

VOCATIONS

1887 1888 1889




# Abraham Lincoln's Vocations

## General

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

# Abram


 LL successful merchants have the faculty of raising the capital they need, or of accomplishing more with less money than the average man can effect. There are persons who surprise us by their wide experience, and others who intuitively recognize what in most cases is only learned by years of contact with the world. It is quite as certain though perhaps less generally recognized that there is a scholarship learned only in a library and a something we cannot call scholarship but an excellent substitute for it which can be won by those to whom schools do not unroll the ample page of knowledge.

Should any of us meet an American, an Englishman or a German well versed in Greek history we feel certain that he has read the master Greeks, either in the original or in translations. But travelers in Greece have met boatmen and shepherds who knew a great deal of ancient Greece because they had talked with their elders. Some years ago a Greek peasant told an American some of the Homeric legends with such eloquence and such delight in the past that the hearer made a remark about commentators on Homer, and the Greek looked amazed. He had never heard that any of the songs or stories of his nation had been printed in books, or that foreigners had heard any of them, but the legends and lays gave new cheer to his holidays and consoled him on the lonely nights. Without knowing Homer as an Oxford prize winner might, he knew him as a Greek of two thousand years ago might have known him. There are shepherds in the Alps who love the rocks and the vegetation that defiles the

# Lincoln's Historic

BY ROLAND RINGWALT

winters—these men have not studied geology and botany on the lines of a school course—they have made observations from childhood, and compared their researches with those of others. It may be that there are students of ehasms and precipices who never heard of Lyell, but whom Lyell would gladly have consulted. It may be that there are gardeners who never heard of Asa Gray who could have told Gray many facts of plant life. What stores of knowledge of Egypt must have lain in the heads of camel drivers who could not read a letter, and of monks who could barely gather the sense of a liturgy.

No medical course can teach what physicians and nurses learn in the epidemic or know of it is that French and Spanish in the bombardment hospital. They learn by names remain on the map. We have law, living through an era, or as the old Greek says who know nothing of it, save that said "the pilot is made in the storm." With Louisiana clings to her French code. But that view accepted we may say that Lincoln a man born before Louisiana was admitted was one of the best informed men of his to statehood, who could remember the action on the history of his own country. Ofquisition of Florida and the admission of his own country—he had no classical training—, who had floated down to New Orleans, and who heard of what Cass was doing—there were scores of school teachers doing in Michigan studied his history.

who knew more of English history than he doing in Virginia, succeeded in making his point. As he knew more of English history than he did, he never studied French chronicles as Parkman did, he never searched the Spanish archives as Prescott did, but he knew remarked that Indiana came within a hair's breadth of adopting slavery. Lincoln was what only a man of the frontier could know. It takes less than a half page of a school history to tell us that France sold the vast Louisiana territory, and some emerge from commercial school content with that isolated fact, un-ery was established, he also understood the noting what accompanied it. Others, probably nineteen out of twenty, who finish a grammar school course, know that there were protests in New England against the constitutionality of the purchase of the new backwoods-man. He grew up knowing that

# Schooling

the issue came to every home, seeing how the free West grew and how the slave states of the South failed to keep up the pace.

While steamboats had started the country on its first great internal improvement was the Erie canal, and that led to a series of projects. In the Illinois legislature Lincoln talked of such plans and lived in an atmosphere of contracts and companies. Surveyor, postmaster, legislator, editorial writer and railroad attorney, he knew the development of the West as well as any of his contemporaries. His desire to be commissioner of the land office, unsatisfied as it was, shows that he longed to see further growth and that he believed himself to be a true pioneer.

Daniel Webster's father had known Indian warfare, but Daniel Webster had not. To New England, to the Middle states, to a good slice of the South all that was past, but Lincoln had reached his majority before Black Hawk went on the war path. Captain Lincoln was an actor in what was only tradition to Washington Irving and little more to Fenimore Cooper. He lived among those who had seen Indians on the war path, and his father had told him of the day the lurking red men had shot his grandfather.

When we consider that Cincinnati in 1844 was amazed that John Quincy Adams should travel so far West we may as well admit that Eastern statesmen had little personal knowledge of the new lands. The gaunt congressman of 1846, the man who debated with Douglas, the candidate who had split rails and kept a country postoffice, knew what even George Bancroft could not have learned from archives, what even Caleb Cushing's industry could not have dug from judicial decisions.



## Lincoln Lore

Bulletin of the  
LINCOLN HISTORICAL RESEARCH  
FOUNDATION

Louis A. Warren - - Editor

This Bulletin is not copyrighted, but items used should be credited to  
The Lincoln National Life Insurance Co. Publishers.

## VOCATIONS

Lincoln's diversified occupations had much to do with his popularity in later years when it was of advantage to be on common ground with many types and classes of people. Upon the announcement of his nomination, in 1860, a correspondent from the Indiana community near the Ohio River, where he had lived during his youth, voiced the sentiment of one group as follows: "Old flat-boat men claim him as one of their number and, as he was a safe pilot in guiding hundreds of boats through the torturous windings of the Father of Waters, so they are quite willing to trust him with the helm of the ship of state, being assured that old Abe is all right."

While one is not tempted to call Lincoln a jack-of-all-trades, there was a time when he apparently was holding down about as many public offices as the law allowed. For a period after the August election, in 1834, he served, at the same time, as a member of the Legislature of Illinois; Postmaster of New Salem, Illinois; and Deputy Surveyor of Sangamon County, Illinois.

In Washington County, Kentucky, on March 7, 1804, the grand jury found a true bill against Jesse Head—who later married Lincoln's parents—on the following charge: "For holding two offices to wit; that of Postmaster, under the authority of the United States, and that of Justice of the Peace, under the authority of the State of Kentucky."

I have asked our own legal department to submit an exhibit or two which might touch upon the right of Lincoln to serve in three civil capacities at the same time. They offer Section 19 of the Illinois Constitution of 1818 as bearing on this question.

"No senator or representative shall, during the time for which he shall have been elected, be appointed to any civil office in this state which shall have been created or the emolument of which shall have been increased during such time."

They find this section is conditioned by two parenthetical clauses that immediately follow, which designate that the civil office in question must have been created, or the emolument of same increased, during the term of the then said senator or representative, to make the holding of it illegal.

## WORKMAN AND STATES-MAN

When Lincoln returned from the Black Hawk War in 1832, we learn from one of his autobiographies that: "He studied what he should do—thought of learning the blacksmith trade—thought of trying to study law." This was the transitional hour in Lincoln's life, when he allowed the exercise of his mind to overshadow the exercise of his great muscular frame. From the autobiographical sketches he prepared, we may learn the evolution of his vocations.

FARMER—"I was raised to farm work which I continued until I was twenty-two."

WOODMAN—"Abraham, though very young, was large for his age (8 yrs.) and had an ax put in his hand at once, and from that until his twenty-third year he was almost constantly handling that most useful instrument."

BOATMAN—"When he was nineteen, still residing in Indiana, he made his first flatboat trip to New Orleans. He was a hired hand merely and he and a son of the owner without other assistance made the trip."

CARPENTER—"This led to their (Lincoln, Johnston and Hanks) hiring themselves to him (Offutt) for twelve dollars per month, each, and getting the timber out of the trees and building a boat at Old Sangamon town."

CLERK—"He (Lincoln) contracted with him (Offutt) to act as clerk for him, upon his return from New Orleans, in charge of a store and mill at New Salem."

SOLDIER—"Abraham joined a volunteer company and to his own surprise was elected captain of it. He went to the campaign and served three months."

MERCHANT—"A man offered to sell and did sell to Abraham and another as poor as himself an old stock of goods upon credit. They opened as merchants. . . The store winked out."

POSTMASTER—"He was appointed postmaster at New Salem—the office being too insignificant to make his politics an objection."

SURVEYOR—"The surveyor of Sangamon offered to depute to Abraham that portion of his work which was within this part of the county."

LAWYER—"In a private conversation he (John T. Stuart) encouraged Lincoln to study law. . . In the autumn of 1836 he obtained a law license, and on April 15, 1837, removed to Springfield."

REPRESENTATIVE—"The election of 1834 came, he was elected to the legislature. . . He was re-elected in 1836, 1838, and 1840."

CONGRESSMAN—"In 1846, he was elected to the lower house of Congress and served one term only."

PRESIDENT—"No affirmation from his own hand is needed to advise us that he became the sixteenth president of the United States and the savior of the Union."

## LINCOLNIANA

(Magazine articles continued from last week.)

Warren, Louis A. Ben Ogden, First Western Cavalier, Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, April.

Warren, Louis A. Hananiah Lincoln in Revolutionary and Pioneer History. Indiana Magazine of History, March.

Warren, Louis A. The Lincoln and LaFollette Families in Pioneer Drama. Wisconsin Magazine of History, June.

## AUTHOR NOT NAMED

Abraham Lincoln. The Railway Clerk, February.

Abraham Lincoln's Homes. The Modern Woodman Magazine, February.

Abraham Lincoln the Man, How He Looked. Golden Book, February.

Carnegie's Pencil; Did Lincoln Use It in Writing the Gettysburg Address? Mentor, March.

How Lincoln Reared a Son. Literary Digest, February 23.

Lincoln Enconium. Wilson Bulletin, February.

Lincoln Letters Published in the Atlantic Monthly. Outlook, February.

New York Press on Lincoln. National Republic, January.

Photographs of Abraham Lincoln with Tad. American Child, February.

Rare Portrait. Current History, February.

The Chivalry of Abraham Lincoln. Garard Review, May.

Trees the Rail-Splitter Did Not Split. Literary Digest, June 22.

## ADDENDA

Barton, William E. Lincoln Among the Aristocrats. Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, April.

Cannon, Mrs. Jouett Taylor. Abraham Lincoln Senior and His Land on Green River. Register of the Kentucky State Historical Society, January.

Croy, Homer. Lincoln Almost Fought a Duel. Rotarian, February.

Hodder, F. H. Some Phases of the Dred Scott Case. Mississippi Valley Historical Review, June.\*

James, Marquis. Story of Lincoln's Assassination, Pursuit, Trial, and Execution of the Conspirators. American Legion Magazine, February, March, April.

Martin, Lorene. The Lincoln Statue in Rosemond Cemetery. Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, April.

Quaife, M. M. The Atlantic Lincoln Discovery. Mississippi Valley Historical Society Review, March.\*

Roll, Charles. Nomination of Abraham Lincoln in 1860. Indiana Magazine of History, March.

Ross, Earl D. Lincoln and Agricultural History, April.\*

\* These articles will appear as reprints and should be included among Books and Pamphlets.

## A Lincoln Program

A study of Lincoln's occupations is valuable inasmuch as it was probably his acquaintances and friendships, acquired through this means, with many classes and types of the common people that brought him up through the various steps that led in 1860 to his election to the office of President of the United States.

Lincoln lived on a farm until he was twenty-two years old. Of common farming we hear less in connection with Abe than of wood cutting and rail splitting. For the latter he is famous and there is a reason for he says himself that at eight years of age an ax was placed in his hand and from that time until he was twenty-two he was continually using it.

This occupation overlaps the previous one and also the following one. His contact with the river began when he was about sixteen or seventeen years of age. He was then employed to operate a ferry boat across Anderson River where it enters the Ohio River. It was at this time he received the two half-dollars of which he said, "I could scarcely believe that I, a poor boy, had earned a dollar in less than a day."

Possibly the training received there opened the way for his opportunity to accompany Allen Gentry on a business trip to New Orleans when he was nineteen.

After the family had moved to Illinois he and his step-brother made a trip to New Orleans for Denton Offutt for which they received \$12.00 per month. It was on this journey that Lincoln is supposed to have observed the slaves being sold at auction and determined to help destroy the institution if an opportunity ever offered.

While not engaged in running the ferry at Anderson River he aided his employer in his packing establishment where produce was prepared for shipment to New Orleans.

Much trading was carried on here.

This experience opened the way for a position as assistant in the merchandise business at the place then called Gentrys.

It is said that he later purchased \$35.00 worth of goods to sell on the way out to Illinois and, according to tradition, "He had doubled his money on his purchases by selling them along the road."

After his arrival in Illinois he made the acquaintance of Denton Offutt, the trader who had hired him to make a trip to New Orleans. This led to an offer for Lincoln to serve as clerk at Offutt's store and mill at New Salem. He worked there less than a year.

Immediately after leaving Offutt's store in 1822 he enlisted in the Black Hawk War and was elected Captain of a band of volunteers which afterwards became a part of the fourth regiment of mounted volunteers in Gen. Whiteside's brigade. Twenty-five years later he said of this honor: "It was a success which gave me more pleasure than any which I have had since."

He served three months but, although he met the ordinary hardships, he was in no battles. At the expiration of the enlistment period opportunity was given for re-enlistment in other units and Lincoln's name appears on the roll of May 25, 1832 as a private in Capt. Alexander White's company. The following day, however, his name was placed on the muster roll of Elijah Hles' company and for twenty days he served this group. He re-enlisted once more and was finally mustered out on July 10, 1832.

When he returned from the Black Hawk War he determined to enter the merchandising business for himself but this venture was a complete failure.

He served as postmaster at New Salem for a short while. His spare time was employed in study.

He was deputy surveyor of Saugamon County for a time. There are records extent of surveys he made.

In the fall of 1836 Lincoln obtained a law license and, on April 15, 1837, removed to Springfield.

Here he engaged in three partnerships. The first was with John Stuart. This came to a successful finish when Stuart was elected to Congress and removed to Washington.

In 1841, at the age of thirty-two, he became associated with Stephen Logan. Lincoln had already achieved the distinction of being elected a member of the Illinois Legislature and this might have influenced Judge Logan to invite him to become his partner. Different reasons have been given as to why this partnership was dissolved but probably politics, the thing that brought them together, separated them also.

William Herndon was the junior partner in the firm of Lincoln and Herndon. During his early associations with Lincoln, Herndon was little more than a helper. In the political field, however, he was valuable. Their common interest was politics and the partnership lasted until Lincoln's election to the presidency.

Lincoln was elected in 1834 to the Legislature and re-elected in the years 1836, 1838 and 1840.

In 1846 he was elected and served one term in the lower house of Congress.

In the fall of 1860 he was elected to the office of president of the United States.



# LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor,  
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana

Number 506

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

December 19, 1938

## LINCOLN'S DIVERSIFIED OCCUPATIONS

Abraham Lincoln at twenty-eight years of age came to the urgent realization that he had no plans for the future. He had drifted about from one temporary occupation to another until he finally reached the decision that some definite resolution with respect to his future must be made.

In the process of contemplating about different kinds of work that he might attempt, he came to this proposition stated in his own words: "I studied what I should do—thought of learning the blacksmith trade—thought of trying to study law—rather thought I could not succeed at that without a better education."

Abraham Lincoln here faced the most important crisis in his personal experience up to that time. He was confronted with the question of whether or not to follow the course of least resistance and train his hands, or to attempt the more difficult task of training his intellect. He could have become a successful blacksmith after a short apprenticeship, but to become a successful disciple of Blackstone would challenge all the energy he possessed. It should ever be credited to the wisdom of Lincoln that he chose the more difficult way.

We have been able to find in Lincoln's own writing his testimony with reference to the different occupations in which he was engaged, and these have been supplemented by brief statements about his achievements in the various tasks which he undertook.

### FARMER

"I was raised to farm work which I continued until I was twenty-two."

Lincoln's agricultural background is revealed in his remarkable address at the Wisconsin State Fair in 1859 when he discussed current problems of the farmer and advocated the need of power-driven plows.

### RAILSPLITTER

"Abraham, though very young, was large for his age (8 years) and had an ax put in his hand at once, and from that until his twenty-third year he was almost constantly handling that most useful instrument."

Railsplitting was Lincoln's most widely known occupation, although it was but one phase of his wider experience as a woodsman. His task of clearing fields of the heavy timber and building cabins found its climax in his superintendence of cutting the timber and of building a flatboat strong enough for a trip to New Orleans. Lincoln's father was an excellent cabinet-maker.

### FLATBOATMAN

"When he was nineteen, still residing in Indiana, he made his first flatboat trip to New Orleans."

Lincoln was but sixteen years of age when he first went to work on the Ohio River as a ferryman. His familiarity with river transportation led to his first New Orleans trip. In 1831, after reaching Illinois, he was again employed to pilot a flatboat to New Orleans, and his first political announcement was a discussion on navigation of western rivers.

### CLERK

"He (Lincoln) contracted with him (Offutt) to act as clerk for him, upon his return from New Orleans, in charge of a store and mill at New Salem."

At a trading post operated by Taylor on Anderson River at Gentry's store, both in Indiana, Lincoln had served as clerk, but he is more often associated with the New Salem experience where he first worked for Offutt and later set up in business for himself.

### SOLDIER

"Abraham joined a volunteer company and to his own surprise was elected captain of it. He went to the campaign and served three months."

The military experience of Captain Lincoln was rather limited, but he did enlist in the Black Hawk War service on two subsequent occasions after his first period of enlistment ran out, and his election to the captaincy gave him much pleasure. His experience as a soldier finally culminated in his occupying the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the Republic by virtue of his office as President.

### POSTMASTER

"He was appointed postmaster at New Salem—the office being too insignificant to make his politics an objection."

The appointment of Abraham Lincoln as postmaster of New Salem in 1833 was Lincoln's first political honor, although it was made by one of different political faith. He served three years in this capacity, and thus received the rare opportunity of reading the current news which sifted through his hands in the form of newspapers and periodicals.

### SURVEYOR

"The surveyor of Sangamon offered to depute to Abraham that portion of his work which was within this part of the county."

The appointment of deputy surveyor, which was offered to Abraham Lincoln, was made contingent upon his preparing himself to fill the office. This called for a general knowledge of mathematics. He soon presented his credentials and was put to work. He became a recognized authority in this field of information.

### LAWYER

"In a private conversation he (John T. Stuart) encouraged Lincoln to study law—In the autumn of 1836 he obtained a law license, and on April 15, 1837, removed to Springfield."

The occupation which Lincoln finally chose to follow as his life work caused him to pursue a course of reading law until he finally arrived at the very head of his profession in the state of Illinois. Lincoln's career as a lawyer sets him apart as one of the outstanding practitioners at the bar in his day.

### STATESMAN

"The election of 1834 came, he was elected to the legislature—He was re-elected in 1836, 1838, and 1840."

"In 1846, he was elected to the lower house of Congress and served one term only."

"In compliance with a custom as old as the government itself, I appear before you to address you briefly, and to take in your presence the oath prescribed by the constitution of the United States to be taken by the President 'before he enters on the execution of his office.'"

A political career which began in 1834 by his election to the House of Representatives of Illinois was followed by three more terms in the same body. Ultimately he became a member of the United States Congress and finally he was elected to the Presidency.

We have observed the humble occupations which engaged Abraham Lincoln's attention as a youth. We have seen him come to the day of decision and choose the more difficult way which prepared him for the Presidency. His understanding of the masses which has caused him to be called "Great Heart" was made possible by his having been associated with so many humble people in his diversified occupations.

## A MAN OF MANY JOBS

**R**AILSPLITTING was Abraham Lincoln's earliest accomplishment—one that he began when only eight years old. Being President of the United States was his last and biggest job—one that brought him enduring fame.

During the forty-four years between the two jobs, Lincoln engaged in various occupations; at one time or another he was a farmer, a woodsman, a flatboatman, a clerk, a sexton, a soldier, a postmaster, a surveyor, a lawyer and a legislator. And the recognition that he gained in these occupations was never entirely overshadowed by his greatness as a President.

**O**NE reason Abraham Lincoln was able to gain recognition in widely varying occupations was that he did every job as faithfully and as thoroughly as he could, whether he was splitting rails, piloting a flatboat, trying a law case or deciding a question of national affairs.

This characteristic caused him to be offered jobs with which he was not familiar. For example, in early life he was asked to be deputy county surveyor—one of the most important jobs in the county—even though he knew very little about the work. It was understood that he would study to fit himself for the position, which he did in the surprisingly short period of six weeks. People seemed to feel that if Lincoln could apply himself so faithfully and thoroughly to one job, he was capable of mastering another although in a different field. He achieved distinction in so many different fields because he was determined to learn everything possible about whatever subject he was interested in and to devote every minute to it.

Moreover, Lincoln took advantage of every chance a job offered him to improve himself. For example, while postmaster he seized the opportunity it gave

him to read the newspapers, since a postmaster was at that time permitted to read all printed matter that came through the post office. By reading very carefully he began to learn to interpret public opinion.

Regardless of what occupation Lincoln was engaged in, he took advantage of every chance to learn to know people. And because he did this he became able to understand the masses of people—an understanding which was necessary in order for him to be the great statesman he later became.

**L**INCOLN was fair and just in all his dealings, no matter how much loss of money and loss of business he experienced and how much extra work he had to do.

He loved honor and justice to such an extent that he would never sacrifice principles for any job. When the job of deputy surveyor was offered to him by a surveyor of different political beliefs, he replied: "If I can be perfectly free in my political action I will take the offer, but if my sentiments or even the expression of them is to be abridged in any way I would not have it or any other office."

While President, Lincoln more fully emphasized this attitude, as, for instance, when he refused to appoint a personal friend of his to an important office because "he did not regard it as just to the public to pay the debts of personal friendship with offices that belonged to the public."

Lincoln's greatest desire seemed to be to serve humanity. He was interested in any job not for the gain that he might get from it but for the service it would enable him to give, and he never allowed any occupation to prevent him from helping those who needed aid. In a word, he considered human values the greatest values in life.

By

PEARL BROWN BRANDS

7-2-1940



Abraham Lincoln was well acquainted with labor—and early in life.

Shortly after the Lincoln family moved from Kentucky to Gentryville, Ind., after having originally gone to Virginia from Berks county, Thomas Lincoln put an axe into his nine-year-old son's hands and pointed to the surrounding forests.

From that moment Abe Lincoln began accumulating fame as a rallsplitter of more than ordinary ability.

In fact it is doubtful if America or any other country ever produced a better rallsplitter.

Lincoln went at his wood chopping job as seriously and as wholeheartedly as he tackled law, legislation and the war in after years.

During the 12 years the family lived in southern Indiana Abe acquired great popularity as a "hired man." When there was nothing for him to do on his father's farm he "hired out" to neighboring farmers, working for 25 cents a day—sunrise to sunset.

For that princely wage (it was large then in that neck of the woods) he was hostler, ploughman, wood chopper, carpenter for the farmer and carried water, built fires, and tended the baby for the farmer's wife.

Everybody jumped at the chance to hire Abe.

When he wasn't raking in a quarter a day from the neighbors, Abe's father made good use of his services. He helped his father clear land, cut fence rails, drove the team, threshed, fanned and cleaned wheat, hoed corn and ground it into meal, took care of what stock the Lincolns had and was first assistant to his step-mother.

In 1830 the Lincolns moved to central Illinois. Here Abe helped build the log cabin home, split enough rails to fence 10 acres of ground, and raised a crop of corn the first summer. Then, at 21, he

began paddling his own canoe.

His first job was to split 400 fence rails for every yard of brown jeans that was necessary to make him a pair of trousers. Being six

feet four tall it was necessary for him to split a couple hundred more rails than the average young man.

Equipped with a new pair of trousers he sailed into the rallsplitting business in a way that scattered chips all over Sangamon county.

When he wasn't splitting rails he worked as farm laborer, though no Lincoln biographer has ever claimed for Abe a bright and shining record as an expert agriculturist. He wasn't. Early in life he had annexed the habit of stopping the team at the far side of the field and climbing on a stump to read a book, which he always carried when plowing. Abe liked history, biography and law books better than a treatise on how to make two blades of grass grow where but one had grown.

In a year or so he made up his mind that he wasn't cut out to be a farm hand, and started building a flatboat, seeing much travel and considerable fortune in navigating to and from New Orleans with farm produce and merchandise. One trip was enough.

Then he tried his skill as a river pilot, assistant surveyor, store clerk, innkeeper and postmaster. All the time he was a student of books. As the old rallsplitting axe grew rustier and rustier Lincoln went from the legislature to law office, to congress, to the white house.

Something like 15 years of his early life Lincoln put in at the hardest kind of manual labor, with long hours and meager pay. He never forgot those long hours of physical labor. It was probably in those years that he came to see the relative importance of labor and capital. He always was ready to give battle to those persons and interests who sought to place capital upon an equal footing, or above, labor. Capital, he maintained, had certain rights which must be protected, but labor, he insisted, had rights far superior, and which must be considered first.







